622 he has been able to accuse the governor himself when called before the uppermost ruler, e.g. after an unsuccessful rebellion, thus freeing himself from any involvement in the guilt. It is he who orders a crier [203] to proclaim the latest decrees of the emperor at the big marketplace within his area.

His function has been likened to those of an Elizabethan Justice of the peace, and there are indeed partial analogies. Among the duties of the ẓeqa shum are:

Proclamation of imperial decrees; including call to arms in case of war;

Officiating at weddings ("semanya", outside church) arranged between kin groups;

Presiding over the village Council of Elders(chilot);

Supervising local "gabbar" on their statute-labor and impressments;

Aiding the "mislanē" in collection of taxes;

Assisting the local priests in collection of dues on church lands;

Estimating the fertility of land, in assessments of land tax;

Mediating between landlord and tenant in case of disagreements (basing himself largely on local custom and unwritten law);

Facilitating efforts of "nägh lēbash" police in pursuit of bandits (shefta);

Arresting local criminals and bringing them before the "dänya"(judge) at the nearest market

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

PART V : INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

156 Social stratification and kinship relations dominate interpersonal relations in Amhara society, and, though they put their stamp also on segments of the Amhara cultural pattern, they do not limit the corresponding artistic expression as much as one might expect. Thus, while Amhara artistic expression shares much of the "formality" of the rest of the culture, it evidences considerable potentialities for individual initiative, particularly in non-material expression such as games of intellect.

538 Material culture has not been much developed among the Amhara; artistic expression also has many of the usual characteristics of a 512 non-literate society, since literacy has traditionally been limited to a small minority of the population. This has led both to a reinforcement of formality in literature, and to a playfulness in oral artistic expression which remained unfettered.

1. Communication and Interpersonal Relations.

203 Communication "by grapevine" is still the major method of dissemination of news, rumor, and entertainment. Feudal lords in the past would even make use of "musical signatures" which identified the sender: to prove that a message was actually sent by the sender, the messenger was taught a secret musical note like a code, which identified the master. There was considerable suspicion about interference with 212 203 messages by enemies, who might alter them, so that, when messages were written, the scribe was careful not to leave a margin at the bottom, lest an enemy intercepting the message might add harmful statements falsely reflecting on the sender (e.g. his loyalty). Since most writing was done by formal, professional scribes, and Geez square writing was used, handwriting was not considered sufficient safeguard for identification. This pattern of leaving no margin persists to this day.

203 Transportation of messages, until the recent installment of telegraph, was by messenger, and still is to a considerable extent. In the past, the king or governor would send an official messenger, ("melekt ṣätta") with the message wedged tightly in a cleft stick carried above the head while running, which assured safety to the runner.

Proclamation of decrees was and sometimes still is drummed out at the public market place, and only in the capital are public radio loudspeakers utilized. These decrees are heard in respectful silence, though unpopular decrees might, among Amhara, be followed by a delayed "murmuring", which, in the past, often led to local rebellions. Spies [208] of the government listen on such occasions to learn public opinion (astäyayät") in time.

211 Landmarks "for memory" are encountered frequently, and they partly take the place of inscribed monuments of cultures of greater literacy. Commemorative monuments in the countryside, called "mäsalänïya", take the form of conical piles of rocks, to which passersby add small rocks, so that one grows sometimes until no one remembers what the original event was. It may have been a battle, or the resting place of a saint. There are no name inscriptions, this being sometimes purposely avoided to prevent an evil spirit such as buda from fastening onto the name and doing harm.

212 To insure precision of communication in matters of culture focus, e.g. in religious communication, a combination of pictures and written words is used. This has developed the ancient comic-strip-type of illustration of religious scenes, mainly biblical, hagiological, and Abyssinian-National, found in canvas paintings on the walls of churches. The words spoken by the character are written into the empty space near the mouth. The scenery is starkly realistic. The style shows fierce concentration on the event depicted, without irrelevent background scenery, naivete, but body positions shown with realistic gusto.

576
572 specific forms. This relationship is mostly that of the "balenjära" (lit. mutual breadgivers), who enjoy the privilege of visiting each other without formal prearrangement; who may call upon each other to stand personal bond ("was"); who are likely to ask each other to act as negotiator for the marriage of a son or daughter before the affair becomes a formal kinship matter.

The very absence of a kinship tie makes it possible for "balenjara" to negotiate arbitration of blood-money to end or prevent a bloody feud between kin groups. The intenseness of the "balenjära" relationship may range from the trusted, though casual companion, "goränsa", usually an age-mate, with whom interpersonal relationships are frequent and regular, but not intense; to the more intense but less frequent and less regular relationships with the "wädaj", a warm friend, "tebeq wädaj", the intimate confidante, so that the two individuals become "mestiräna" (mutual bosom pals) to each other. "Balenjära" address each other with "antu" (the more polite form of "thou"; and other "thou", "antä", being used for children and inferiors mostly). When walking or standing and talking to each other, "balenjära" (and also other acquaintances, if on the same social level) interlace one or two of their fingers, loosely, but enough to remain in physical communication. Like kinsmen, "balenjära" men kiss each other on t he neck when they meet after not having seen each other for some weeks. Women may also establish "balenjära" relations with other women, and go on picnics together after the harvest in the dry season, especially on church holidays, but Amhara men believe that women do not form long-lasting friendships as often as men do.

[203] Dissemination of news and rumors through the "grapevine" occurs frequently through the channel of the "balenjära", who utilize the occasion of a bit of news as justification to drop in on each other, and to share barley beer and "enjära" bread (hence the term).

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

CAP. XXVIII.—*How the goods arrived at the town of Barra, and of the bad equipment of the Barnagais.*

On the 3rd day of July of the said year, '20, our baggage 648
arrived at the town of Barra, where we were. We hoped to start at once, and went to speak to the Barnagais requiring him to despatch us. We met with good words from him. On the following day a gentleman from the court of Prester John arrived, and the Barnagais gave him such a reception that he forgot us. When this gentleman arrived the Barnagais went out of the town to receive him at a small hill near the houses; and there went out with him many people, and he was naked from the waist upwards. The gentleman placed himself on the highest spot above the rest, and his first words were: the King sends to salute you. At these words all went with their hand upon the ground, [576]
which is the courtesy and reverence of this country. After that, he spoke the message which he had brought, and when he had finished hearing it the Barnagais clothed himself with rich garments, and took the gentleman to his house. It is the usage of this country to hear the words which the [203]
Prester sends outside the house, and on foot, and he to whom they are sent has to be naked above the waist until they have been delivered, and if the message is one of satisfaction on the part of Prester John, as soon as it is given he at once dresses himself: if it expresses his dissatisfaction, he remains naked as when he heard it. This Barnagais is brother of the mother of Prester John. After this the ambassador, and we with him, came to speak to the Barnagais, and he sent us away saying that for the love of God we should leave him, that he was sick. When we came they did not allow us to enter, saying that he was sleeping. So much passed of this sort that the ambassador said that he ill remembered what he had sworn and promised to the Captain-major of the King of Portugal, that is to say,

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

claimed with the provinces. It was at a lower level that his official hierarchy was, in theory, in continuous contact with the regional and hereditary element. The governors' deputies and their assistants in the still smaller districts might or might not be local men, but when we come to the heads of villages or groups of villages we find that the leader and representative of the people and the lowest agent of the Emperor and his governor were united in the person of the *chiqa-shum*.

This officer was universal in Tigré, Amhara, and most of Galla country though in the latter this title was not always used. Because of his close association with the customary agrarian societies there were local variations in his status and duties. In general character and importance, even though the analogy is not exact, the *chiqa-shum* occupied something like the position of the Elizabethan justice of the peace. In his office central and local authority met. He was responsible to the governor's district chief for the proper performance by his own community of their duties and especially for their payments to the proper authorities of tithe and tax and of dues in kind and labour. He was the judge to whom, if wayside arbitration failed, the litigants would first apply. He would be present at local weddings; would preside at meetings of the village council, and would be especially concerned with all transfers or allocations of land and disputes about it. He would see that orders from the higher authorities were proclaimed by a crier in the village.

According to an Ethiopian account he is 'the officer of the district, living upon the soil as one joined to it'.[1] He is the agent of the Emperor. 'He will be an Amhara and may accuse even the Governor. If a man touches or strikes him, he (i.e. the striker) will not pay compensation, but all his goods will be confiscated.'[2] Coulbeaux defines him as 'le maire de la commune . . . tuteur, père même'. He manages the affairs of the village like his own, and his patriarchal authority is sacred. He is generally the genealogical chief of the community, and calls the village council together under a tree.[3] Certainly these village chiefs, representing continuity of tradition and the sedentary agricultural life, were the stabilizing factor in a system in which changing governors, roving armies, and a distant Emperor played the more dramatic, but often the more superficial, parts. This especially struck Plowden. 'There is in each village', he wrote, 'one hereditary officer that cannot be displaced on any pretence; and it is this institution alone that preserves some appearance of order in the absence of all written documents, amidst the whirl of revolutions and the rapid succession of dynasties and gover-

[1] Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 42. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 184. [3] Coulbeaux, vol. 1, pp. 35–6.

the connection between the weak debtera, his familiars, and his therapies is, at most, tacit, and unarticulated. More often, clients ignore the tie altogether, and conveniently assimilate this debtera into position (8) of the logically maximal chain.

The diagnostic significance of this move does not detain the client. Therapeutic success is in itself regarded as sufficient, and diagnostic speculation is not indulged. Therapeutic failure, likewise, tends to be interpreted in pragmatic terms only, indicating that the services of a more powerful healer must be obtained if the sickman is to be cured. Probably, the choice will be a ganel gelac, but it is possible that even an herbalist of reknown will be chosen.

Real herbalist chains are, then constructed by clients on an ad hoc basis. In constructing his herbalist chain, the client is dependent upon, first, the actual distribution of relevant practitioners within his environs, and, second, persons who can communicate this information to him. A client knows the herbal specialties of most residents of his own hamlet, and of the more prominent healers of the parish in which his hamlet is located. Beyond the parish, however, he knows the names of few secular practitioners, and these few are healers with whom he has stood previously as a client. To build his chain, he must often rely on information

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

*278
*756
*759
• 203

provided by kinsmen, neighbors, and lower grade herbalists who are familiar with the identity of professional colleagues in their own disease-name specialties. A client sometimes has difficulty finding local herbalists with which to staff a desired herbalist chain. The ("weak") debtera is often a "convenient" choice to fill this deficiency. He is a member of a class of practitioners who are famous for practicing therapies for a wide variety of ailments. Moreover, the debtera is conspicuous. In ecclesiastical performances, divination, and providing prophylactic amulets, he is observed and patronized by many residents of the district in which he lives. Thus, although potential clients may not know his therapeutic repertoire in detail, he is considered a potentially relevant practitioner about whom clients are always likely to make active inquiries.

*756
*793

*278
75

The empirical chain is the product of non-medical as well as medical considerations. The client's non-medical interests include the cost of therapy, the discomfort associated with the therapy, and the distance which the client might have to travel to reach the therapist. Lower grade herbalists are always less expensive and generally less painful than higher grade ones, and the client is more likely to find a lower grade herbalist in his vicinity. So far as non-medical factors are considered in isolation, initial consultation with a

632
621
592
463

two as talla sellers, and one each as mat seller, carpenter, day laborer, and pensioner.

*278
*759
369

The practice of herbalist therapies in ward and town contrasts significantly with the situation in rural hamlet and parish. The relatively dense population of the town has important consequences. In the countryside, the closest herbalist needed for a specific episode may be a day's walk from the client's home; in the town several may be found within an hour's walk. The increase in herbalist therapies is not directly proportional to the increased population of town over countryside, however.

*278
*759
632

In Gabrael sebeka, for example, only eighteen households (41% of the total) contain one or more herbalists. Many townfolk are forced to abstain from practicing herbalist therapies, because, as out-landers, they are unable or disinclined to locate needed botanicals. Also, significant numbers of townsfolk practice non-secular therapies, particularly as balazars.

*278
*759
369
• 203
602

Further, although there are more redundant herbalist therapies potentially available to the townsman, he remains ignorant of many of them. The peasant locates himself within a network of several core kinsmen and neighbors upon whom he depends for information regarding herbalist chains. The townsman finds his place in a social matrix in which kinship ties are greatly diluted by distance. In Gabrael sebeka, for example, thirty-two house-

632
621
592
602

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

592
602
621
632

holds (73% of the total) are without kinship ties to any other of the ward's households. Although many of these residents have kinsmen in other parts of Gondar, few have more than one or two relatives in the town.

[613] In addition, because most townfolk rely upon non-
[423] agricultural employment for their subsistence needs,
[241] there is a concomitant disinterest in ambilineage fields. A consequence is a weakening of the important economic bonds which otherwise link kinsmen to one another.

*278 Kinship ties are an important means by which the
*759 peasant acquires and communicates information necessary
• 203 for constructing herbalist chains. Since almost every
602 herbalist therapy of the rural parish enjoys its own
369 "pedigree", or trans-generational reputation, the peasant
613 herbalist is provided with means for 1) publicly validating his therapeutic claims, and 2) communicating the existence of the therapy to his potential clients. Potential clients frequently associate the ownership of a famous herbalist therapy with the members of a specific ambilineage, often identifiable by name. Both the ambilineage (whose identity is linked to its fields) and its medical reputation (which is tied to the ambilineage) are attached to a particular location. Since residence is most often viripatrilocal, the transmission of such therapeutic reputations is characterized by an
*278 agnatic bias. The male therapist moving to town, like
*759
203
369

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

the female moving away to her husband's parish, is generally cut off from this reputation. Thus, the herbalist in the town must most often establish this professional existence and reputation de novo. There is no way in which he can stimulate clients to come his way other than by empirical proofs. If his therapy is directed against an ailment for which even expert herbalist therapy promises success in only a fraction of cases, or an ailment which is epidemiologically infrequent, his difficulties are so much the greater. Thus, in spite of Gondar's relatively great population, the town contains only a handful of herbalists of provincial-wide fame. These same considerations dampen the herbalist's readiness to acquire new disease-name specialties. In addition to the difficulties already noted in Chapter 2, such a therapist would likewise be forced to establish his new professional presence de novo, even though he enjoyed an already established reputation against another ailment.

The contrast between the place of herbalist therapies in town and country has been most notably effected by the relative accessibility of non-herbalist therapies in the town. This is a result of the concentration of non-herbalist practitioners in towns, and of the relative affluence enabling townsmen to purchase more expensive therapies.